

Pageant by Paula Lane

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PROLOGUE

It all started because I needed money.

My parents had passed away in a boating accident that summer. Their lawyer had explained that it would probably take six to eight months before my parents will was through probate, and in spite of the fact that I was receiving grants and loans to pay for my education I was still a little short of money for living expenses.

I had placed an ad in the local college newspaper stating that I would do anything for fifteen hundred dollars. I figured that with that amount I would be able to finish out the school year before I needed to find a job. Little did I realize how much trouble, and I have to admit also fun, anything like this could get me into.

I came back to my room in the dorm one evening and had just sat down at my desk when the phone started ringing. I stumbled across the room and grabbed it. "Hello."

The voice at the other end hesitated. "Is this the person who placed the ad in the Student Times? The one who would *be* anything for fifteen hundred dollars."

I assured her that she had the right number.

"And you'll really do anything for that amount?"

This set off several warning fights in my brain. "Well there are some limits. I mean I won't do anything illegal or anything that's likely to get me thrown out of school, but I will do just about anything else. Just what did you have in mind?"

"Before I tell you about the job," she said, "could you tell me a little about yourself. I don't want to appear nosy but there are several

physical requirements for this job."

I knew that it had been too good to be true. This was always the problem. They wanted a huge muscle man and I was more the *ninety-eight pound weakling* type. "I'm about five feet seven inches and weigh about one hundred and thirty pounds," I said, knowing that this would most likely kill any chance I had of getting the job.

I almost dropped the phone when she said "That's just perfect. When can we get together and I'll fill you in on the details of the job?"

As the next day was a Saturday, we made a date to meet for lunch at a local fast food restaurant

The next day I sat in the restaurant nursing a small coke. After sitting there for nearly an hour I decided that the girl wasn't going to show up. The response had probably been a set up. I was starting to leave when a girl walked up to the table.

"Excuse me, but are you Brian Young?"

I looked up at where she was standing. She was an average girl. About my height and weight, but as I said, I run on the small side. She was dressed in jeans and a school sweater. I nodded in agreement and she sat down across from me. She spent the next several minutes studying me up and down like I was a piece of furniture she was planning on buying and she wanted to determine how I would fit in with the set. Finally nodding to herself she said "You'll do perfectly."

"I'm glad that I'll do." I said "Now if you'll just tell me what it is that I'm perfect for, maybe we can make a deal."

"I'm sorry. Let me introduce myself. My name is Heather Baines. I'm a member of SNOW. The Student Nation of Organized Woman. We have a project that I think you would be perfect for. We'll pay you the fifteen hundred dollars and all you need to do is enter and try to win a contest. It will take about a week."

"Let me get this straight," I said leaning over the table, "all I

need to do to earn the money is enter and try to win this contest, and I get paid even if I don't win. That sounds almost too good to be true. What contest is it?"

"Again I'm sorry, I thought I told you. You're going to be Sigma Delta Pi's sorority's entry into the home coming queen contest."

While I was trying to get my mouth working again she went on to explain that the sorority had agreed to help SNOW show how sexist beauty pageants actually were. They were going to sponsor a man in the contest. Only nobody would know it was a man until after he had won. They would show the world just how stupid these contests were. After winning they would reveal that the current home coming queen was a man.

"But, what about afterward," I stammered, "I won't be able to show my face on campus."

"If that's a problem we'll use a false name or something," she said, "and nobody should be able to recognize you once you're back to dressing normally."

I finally regained full control over my speech centers. "But there's no way I could convince anybody that I was a woman. It just wouldn't work. I mean I'm a guy—there's just no way."

"Look," she said "there's this friend of mine. She's also in SNOW. She does makeovers all the time and is helping in this project. If she can make you over into a convincing female, will you at least consider the idea?"

I reluctantly agreed to at least meet with this other woman. Heather gave me directions to her house and told me to be there at seven and she'd see that Tammy would be there.